

## ***EQUAL Defense Act – Supportive Statements***

### **Public Defenders**

“Chief Defenders across the state have been feeling the impact of increased workloads and insufficient budgets to staff their offices appropriately. Mine is no exception. We have incurred and have absorbed the many changes in the law with no additional resources. This fiscal year, we are currently facing budget cuts with increased workloads that we have faced due to new legislation in the past few years, as well as mandated post- conviction relief. We are forever grateful for the swing of the pendulum to reduce overcrowded jails, help for the mentally ill, and post- conviction relief, but need resources to complete those missions. We refuse to practice law in our office with mediocracy, and practice excellent service in a high performing organization. But, we need help with additional resources to parallel that of the prosecution.” – **Kathleen Pozzi, Sonoma County Public Defender**

“On behalf of the Public Defender’s Office of Santa Barbara County it is my privilege to voice our support of Senator Harris’ EQUAL Defense Act of 2019. As Public Defenders we are charged with upholding some of the most sacred constitutional rights for our clients. These services require zealous advocacy, fair funding and parity with our counterparts at the district attorney’s office. Senator Harris’ proposed legislation would take a huge step towards achieving that parity and upholding the promise of Gideon v. Wainwright.” – **Santa Barbara County Chief Public Defender, Tracy M. Macuga**

"I am delighted to learn of Senator Harris' bill. This could potentially be a huge help to public defender offices throughout the nation. Through its provisions for grants and financial parity with prosecutors, the bill would benefit our clients, who are the poorest and most vulnerable persons in our legal system." – **Mendocino County Public Defender**

“I think this is a great bill and it is long overdue. There has been a huge amount of funding dedicated to prosecution, policing, probation, and systems of control. It is not surprising that we are at where we are in terms of mass incarceration. Funding public defense offices properly is a tremendous step in fixing what is a broken system.” – **Alameda County Public Defender, Brendon D. Woods**

### **State Senators**

“Equal defense should be a bed rock of our public-defense system,” Mitchell said in endorsing Harris’ bill. “As the author of 10 #EquityAndJustice measures signed into law over the past two years, I and most members of the California Legislature have recognized the painful inequities perpetuated on people of color for decades. As the author of eight #EconomicJustice measures introduced this year, I know our job is not done. This measure by U.S. Sen. Kamala Harris will help those constituents who need help the most, and is money spent wisely.” – **California State Sen. Holly J. Mitchell, D-Los Angeles, and chair of the Senate Budget and Fiscal Review Committee**

“I wholeheartedly support the EQUAL Defense ACT of 2019 and commend Sen. Harris for leading this important effort to level the playing field in our nation’s courtrooms. For too long, our criminal justice system has been weighted in favor of prosecutors and against public defenders. Every defendant deserves a competent defense.” – **California State Senator and Chair of the Senate Public Safety Committee, Nancy Skinner (D-Berkeley, CA)**

"The EQUAL Defense Act is a comprehensive plan to enhance efficiency and due process for defendants and the courts. Senator Harris understands the relationship between training and the fair application of the public defender system. Implementable, bold ideas that have a positive impact on lives and better use our resources are exactly what we need to enhance our legal system." – **CA State Senator Anthony Portantino (25th District)**

“Our public defenders provide a critical service to our legal system and are often the most overworked and under-resourced lawyers in the system. I'm grateful to Senator Harris for introducing this bill and for the support it will bring to our local attorneys who serve in this vital role.” – **CA State Senator Ben Allen (26th District)**

“Without robust funding and reasonable workloads, our public defense system is bound to fall short of the letter and the spirit of the Constitution. An underfunded and overworked public defender corps also doesn’t make us safer—it makes us more vulnerable, sending innocent neighbors into an unjust cycle of recidivism and marginalization. I applaud Senator Harris for introducing the EQUAL Defense Act, which honors the fundamental American and Californian values of fairness, liberty and justice.” – **CA State Senator Henry Stern (27th District)**

“Justice cannot be served when an accused is deprived of their constitutional right to counsel. During my 32 years of service as an Air Force JAG, we treated prosecutors and defense counsel the same - equal pay, equal resources and equal training. It’s called a level playing field - and, that’s what equal justice is all about! I applaud Senator Harris’ leadership in fighting to bring equity and fairness to our civilian legal system.” – **CA State Senator Richard Roth (31st District)**

“The enormous workload and number of cases that public defenders are required to respond to creates great stress and affects their ability to provide effective assistance to their clients, most of which are low income. Senator Kamala Harris' EQUAL Defense Act of 2019 addresses this critical problem and I am proud to support it.” – **California State Senator Anna Caballero**

### **State Assemblymembers**

“Right to counsel is a fundamental pillar of our criminal justice system in the United States. I applaud Senator Harris’ proposal to ensure every person charged with a crime has access to adequate legal representation and our criminal justice system works for all.” – **California Assemblymember David Chiu (D-San Francisco)**

“Our justice system is founded on robust and fair trials that find the truth. The EQUAL Defense Act will provide important grant funding and direction that supports these foundational principles.” – **CA Assemblymember Jacqui Irwin (44th District)**

“For far too long, our public defenders have been severely underfunded. They work tirelessly on behalf of our nation’s most vulnerable communities to ensure every person gets the assistance of counsel guaranteed by the Constitution. Public defenders play a vital role in our society, and they certainly deserve more resources,” said Assemblymember Sabrina Cervantes (D-Corona). “I applaud Senator Kamala Harris for her leadership on the EQUAL Defense Act, which will help our criminal justice system become both more fair and robust.” – **CA Assemblymember Sabrina Cervantes (60th District)**

“When your freedom is on the line, your bank account shouldn’t determine whether you get good legal representation. I support the EQUAL Defense Act of 2019 because it ensures the accused have a truly fair shot to make their case, while also helping to restore balance in the criminal justice system.” – **California Assemblymember Phil Ting (D-San Francisco)**.

“Public defenders are a critical component of our justice system. They are often the only line of defense that low-income communities of color have access to because private legal representation is simply too costly. But too often, public defenders are overworked and lack the resources they need. All public servants deserve the proper tools to perform their work at the highest level. I'm proud to support Senator Kamala Harris' legislation, the Equal Defense Act of 2019, to provide greater equity and justice where it is critically needed.” – **Assemblymember Rob Bonta (D-Oakland, CA)**

“The United States has an unequal justice system that disproportionately punishes people of color. We try to stand on the fundamental principle that justice should look the same for everyone. However, the reality is that the justice system has failed, an indigent defendant, an overburdened public defender, and an unconscionable caseload is a formula for inadequate legal services. The EQUAL Defense Act of 2019 will provide grant funding and training to the offices of public defenders around the country to make sure all defendants have adequate counsel.” – **CA State Assemblymember Sydney Kamlager-Dove (54th District)**

“I am pleased to support this important piece of legislation that will bring much needed criminal justice reform. We can hardly call our system just if those tasked with representing the poor and people of color are not given the tools they need to provide effective legal assistance. Our public defenders have been overworked and underpaid for far too long, leading to high rates of staff turnover. A public defender system that constantly requires new attorneys often fresh out of law school cannot possibly provide adequate legal assistance when seated across from seasoned, career prosecutors. Our budgetary choices reflect our values and this bill says we value fairness, equality and justice in our criminal justice system.” – **Assemblyman Reggie Jones-Sawyer, AD 59**

“I am proud to stand with U.S. Senator Kamala Harris in support of the Equal Defense Act. This is a long overdue proposal to ensure the public is better served in the interest of justice. Our system of law provides defendants with the right to an attorney, but too often, that right is undermined by our inability to ensure caseloads are manageable. The Equal Defense Act provides a portfolio of solutions to strengthen our capacity to serve the most vulnerable and its

implementation is necessary if we are serious about maintaining the integrity of our justice system.” – **CA Assemblymember Mike A. Gipson (64th District)**

### **County Supervisors**

“The right to an attorney in criminal trials is as old as the Constitution, but it wasn’t made real until the Supreme Court applied it to the states and later held that the government must provide one. It only became a reality, though, when a woman lawyer in LA successfully advocated for the creation of the Los Angeles County Public Defender's Office in 1912, the first public defender's office in the nation. Since then, public defenders’ offices have become an essential element of our justice system. This bill would create a much-needed \$250 million grant program to fund public defense and would authorize \$5 million for non-profit and government organizations to train them. That would be money well spent!” – **LA County Supervisor and Board President, Sheila Kuehl**

“I am proud to support the EQUAL Defense Act of 2019, which would ensure a more effective defense for those who require the services of a public defender,” said Los Angeles County Supervisor Hilda L. Solis. “The Constitution guarantees the right to counsel, but many public defender offices throughout the country are overworked and underpaid. The EQUAL Defense Act of 2019 would help reduce these disparities within our nation’s criminal justice system by protecting the right to due process and a fair trial.” – **Los Angeles County Supervisor, Hilda Solis**

“The hard work our public defenders do every day is under-appreciated— it cannot also be under-funded. Senator Harris’ proposal will help provide our public defender programs with the funding they need to do this important work and do it well.” – **Los Angeles County Supervisor, Janice Hahn (4th District)**

“Inequity for our public defenders means disparities on behalf of our most vulnerable populations. I strongly support Senator Kamala Harris’ Equal Defense Act - let’s make way for pay parity, lower student debt, manageable workloads for our public defenders. The human cost of justice is far too high, the lives and liberty of our marginalized communities matter.” – **Supervisor Vallie Brown, District 5, San Francisco Board of Supervisors**

“The only way to ensure equitable representation for people who are accused of crimes is to make sure they have an adequate defense. The Equal Defense Act of 2019 gets us closer to equity in representation for individuals who cannot afford an attorney of their own. Public defenders cannot provide adequate representation until the funding they receive is equitable to that of which is received by the prosecution. In addition to resources, it is also important to ensure that public defenders don’t have a high workload, that keeps them from providing the best defense possible. I am proud to support Senator Harris’ Equal Defense Act of 2019. To uphold the promise and tenets of Gideon v. Wainwright.” – **San Francisco District 10 Board of Supervisor Member, Shamann Walton**

“Public defenders are integral to ensuring justice and liberty in our communities. As Bryan Stevenson has said ‘The opposite of poverty is not wealth. It’s justice.’ Public defenders work

tirelessly and often without any fanfare to fight for those without the resources to defend themselves. It is long past time that we recognize their tremendous value and commit to fully funding their work so that they may be as effective as possible.” – **Matt Haney, San Francisco Supervisor**

“Being a public defender is an important, but often thankless government position,” said County of San Diego Supervisor Nathan Fletcher. “The Equal Defense Act ensures public defenders receive fair wages, good working conditions and career enhancement opportunities. By stabilizing the work environment for public defenders we ensure they are able to remain committed to vigorously defend their clients’ best interests.” – **San Diego County Supervisor, Nathan Fletcher**

“Competent defense and public defense without delays save taxpayer dollars and helps distinguish the innocent from the guilty. This bill will help local counties provide that foundation of our justice system.” – **Santa Barbara County Supervisor, Das Williams (1st District)**

“This bill could potentially be very helpful to public defender offices throughout the nation, including our public defender’s office here in Riverside County,” said Riverside County Supervisor V. Manuel Perez. “This bill would greatly benefit those people who are often the poorest and most vulnerable in our legal system. Only by having parity can we ensure justice for our people. Thank you, Senator Kamala Harris, for recognizing the need for equality on both sides in the criminal justice system.” – **Riverside County Supervisor, V. Manuel Perez (4th District)**

“As a former public defender, I know the extreme workload that public defenders have to deal with. It is not fair to the public defender and definitely not to the individual they must represent. Senator Kamala Harris’ EQUAL Defense Act of 2019 will bring the change the system desperately needs and I am proud to support it.” – **Kern County Supervisor Leticia Perez**

### **Mayors**

“The proposed introduction of the Equal Defense Act would lay the groundwork for addressing inequities in a legal system, which often appears that adequate representation is only based on a person’s financial standing. Additionally, receiving the services of the Office of the Public Defender, should come with a sense of confidence in representation. Finally, I’m extremely supportive of the data collection component of the Act, for the purpose of transparency and accountability of a service intended to ensure some degree of a “level playing field” within the legal system.” – **Rialto Mayor, Deborah Robertson**

“I would like to thank Senator Kamala Harris for introducing the Ensuring Quality Access to Legal Defense (EQUAL) Defense Act to address the inequity in our criminal justice system. This is a step in the right direction to level the disparities for public defenders who are over worked and underpaid. Their clients’ liberty is on the line and deserve an effective defense. We should

support Sen. Harris' efforts to reform the criminal justice system that is long overdue." – **National City Mayor, Alejandra Sotelo Solis**

"Public Defenders work extremely hard and their workload should not prevent them from providing the best counsel possible to any resident in my city. Sen Kamala Harris' EQUAL Defense Act of 2018 will make much needed reforms and that is why I am proud to support it." – **Mayor Michelle Roman, City of Kingsburg**

"As a Mayor, I want to ensure that all of my constituents have fair access to legal counsel. The workload put on our public defenders is preventing fair representation. Sen. Kamala Harris' EQUAL Defense Act of 2019 will help remedy this injustice and I am proud to support it." – **Mayor Jose Gurrola, City of Arvin**

### **City Council Members**

"I would like to thank Senator Harris for her leadership in working to provide access to equal justice under the law. The right to counsel under the Sixth Amendment and defined by the Courts has long been hampered by the under-funding of public defender offices across this country. By proposing funding for public defense, Senator Harris is moving us towards the true meaning of justice by ensuring access to a meaningful defense." – **Rebecca Kaplan, civil rights lawyer and President of the Oakland City Council**

"Our criminal justice system is designed to favor and compensate prosecutors which has the unfortunate effect of preemptively criminalizing our people without providing them with an adequate means to wage a strong defense. By providing increased funding and advocating for parity between public defenders and prosecutors The EQUAL Defense Act of 2019 rebalances the scales and gets us one step closer to a society where the phrase "and justice for all" is applicable to those access to vast and limited resources alike." – **Culver City Councilmember, Daniel Lee**

"From the moment a poor mother has a child she must worry about equal access for her child. Equal access to good education, equal access to clean air, equal access to safe streets, equal access to college, equal access to work opportunities and equal access to justice. Disenfranchised groups must be concerned that they not only begin on an uneven playing field but that they must sacrifice everything, in order to protect their family members from overbroad charges, heavy sentencing and long stays in prisons which institutionalize minds and bodies who would otherwise be constituents working and having children. I have witnessed many lives destroyed because they could not afford an attorney and gave up their right to a fair trial and in most cases freedom. This is why I support this bill." – **City of Ventura Councilmember, Lorrie Brown**

"A quality legal defense is at the core of our right to a fair trial. Too often those charged with crimes - who are disproportionately people of color - are defended by overworked, underpaid public defenders and starting their trials on the back foot. The EQUAL Defense Act will recalibrate the scales of our justice system to make sure defendants are getting the effective defense they need to have a fair shot in court." – **Los Angeles City Council President, Herb Wesson (10th District)**

“I am proud to support the EQUAL Defense Act. Far too often, public defenders are overworked with insufficient resources for their caseload. This has led to even more disparity within our criminal justice system. Not only is this bill a step in the right direction, but it will also help to create a more equitable system that will give public defenders the chance to mount a strong defense.” – **San Diego City Councilmember, Monica Montgomery**

“Communities across the nation are demanding substantive, forward-thinking changes to a justice system that has distressed entire generations,” said Councilmember Chris Ward. “The Equal Defense Act of 2019 will be an empowering tool for public defenders, and the public, ensuring a core principle of democracy is accessible and protected.” – **San Diego City Councilmember, Chris Ward**

"This legislation makes the difference for those who have the decks stacked against them since birth. It helps bring the promise of the Constitution into our everyday lives." – **Los Angeles City Councilmember, Marqueece Harris-Dawson (8th District)**

“I applaud Senator Harris’ EQUAL Defense Act for taking an in-depth look at a major inequity within the justice system – one’s right to counsel. It is a major step in balancing the scales of an unequal system, where every American has a right to an adequate public defense, no matter their socio-economic status.” – **Long Beach City Councilmember, Rex Richardson**

“As a lawyer and citizen of this country, I am truly concerned about the health of the rule of law and the health of our system of justice which requires a fair trial for all litigants and certainly for all those accused of crimes. I am very supportive of Senator Harris’ efforts to create a fairer system by properly compensating the unsung heroes of our democracy: the public defenders. These lawyers make sure that we will have fair trials, that people are prosecuted and judgements are rendered based on the evidence and not the lack of adequate counsel. You never know when you Joe Q. Citizen are going to need a lawyer.” – **Oxnard City Councilmember, Carmen Ramirez**

### **Organizations**

“The Equal Defense Act of 2019 is long overdue. Everyone deserves a competent defense attorney to represent them in court. The Equal Defense Act will level the playing field for public defenders.” – **Charisse Bremond Weaver, President & CEO of the Brotherhood Crusade**